Oceanic Accelerationism

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The environmental activist, conservationist, and marine biologist Rachel Carson once said that when life came ashore millions of years ago it brought a piece of the ocean with it. One of the strange constructive constraints of being on a land filled with things was the eventual birth of trade and debt. Economics, broadly construed (and schizoanalytically eyed) threatens to, in a theory-theoretical sense, speed us back to the sea through a technological progress unbound in the form of the capitalist accelerationism of both. Under this metaphorical construction, technology and capitalism broadly grasped are those privileged fields that take us to a world of pure fluidity, but is there a madwoman or madman of theory up to the task of navigating these waters?

Many contemporary theorists (Sadie Plant, Luciana Parisi, Nick Land) have soaked up the 'flow frenzy' of a hyperbolic Deleuzianism, suggesting a material, and not merely libidinal (a la Lyotard) saturation to the solution. They embrace the call to run naked

into the world of theory and experiment like swimmers who have forgotten about the resistance of the water. Liquid capital—or financial capital—are the castle in the sand at the edge of the flood. Plant inhabits this territory in her push and pull between ultra fluidity and radical essentialism. Land, however, was more than aware of the threat of the oceanic. The desert as Body without Organs in Land is flooded by cyberfeminist oceans. He re-draws the Kantian schema as a rotting oil derrick in the face of a sublime tidal wave.

The signs of a flood are everywhere; a tsunami is how Carl Cederstrom and Peter Fleming begin their text *Dead Man Working.* [1] Drawing from a work by Franco Berardi, they describe a world in which the worker of post-Fordist capital inhabits an emotionally deadened waiting game, unsure of when and if the end of capital will come -- an end which may in fact coincide with the end of life. This uncertainty comes from a massive capitalist fluidity that crashes against locality. For financial capital, shaving milliseconds from trades also means the blasting of tunnels for fiber-optic cables linking city to city, a physical ungrounding of the land itself. The effects of capital have fully saturated not just the economic conditions,

but also the very material conditions of life. It is not just a threat of precarity that we find ourselves under, but the possibility of expulsion from life itself.

Luciana Parisi describes how the materialization of the capitalist ocean have altered even the biological conditions of life. This arises in the effects the flows of capital has on the terms of the specific sexual exchanges of genetic material. She outlines Elaine Morgan's adaptation of Allister Hardy's theory of the aquatic ape, in which a shore-like existence leads to vaginal migration and the erasure of the visible and olfactory signs of sexual excitement. The tidal wave of capitalism washes away these biological signs in obscurity and re-codes them in cultural practices, practices that all too often result in a virulent sexism that simultaneously praises and rages against the fluidity of the feminine.

Yet, in *Zeroes and Ones* Sadie Plant ironically recasts this Edenic fall as a wave of possibility: we were once in a kind of oceanic happiness and then things went wrong, but how facetious is she being, since the fall she describes is now life itself? Capitalism is the form waiting for life; it is that which made possible exchanges beyond our own little

ecologies. Plant convincingly demonstrates that the technological and material changes wrought by capitalism do not necessarily have to follow the restrictive ideals of a masculine ideology. Capital is the sufficient but not the necessary means of some fluidic regime, a regime which, if not in a panic with the associated sublime horror or monstrous feminine-- is simply the enemy of reason-- that which erodes the shores of rational discourse. One could argue that masculinized capital is a parasite on the potentialities of the feminine which then must deny and shore itself of any inherent (or non-obvious) teleology. But would a change to a more feminist ecological exchange threaten the nature of capitalism?

The exaggerated (maybe necessarily so?) move of the accelerationist is to hyperbolically/hyperstitionally enhance the spectral thing or system that is capitalism into a xeno-monstrosity, an alien that has been waiting for human hosts. [2] We (those human, all too human humans) seem torn between futilely swinging our swords at the incoming waves like mad berserkers rushing to our own drowning, or we seem committed to celebrating capitalism's destratification of all forces and all things. The revolutionary struggle has been miscast as a war against,

and as a choice between, the apocalyptic costs of a masculanized capitalism, or a return to utopic pre-capitalist feminist ocean.

Are Deleuze and Guattari to blame? Do the hyperbole of accelerationism and cyber-feminism point to the rotting potato roots of their project? In 'Becoming Animal...' Deleuze and Guattari say: "So experiment." [3] But as Land points out in his stimulated analysis, this leads to an excess of tactics without strategy. [4] The problem is this: what capitalism seems to be doing—embracing all tactics to profit off of them—is accompanied by the necessity of applying a cost and this exposes an underlying strategy which is as obvious as it is gross: life itself is reduced to profit over cost. High speed trade and liquid assets have made an ocean out of capital and populated it with creatures (algorithms) which behave together in ways we fundamentally cannot predict (a firm unleashed alghorithms on its own company, managing to make it insolvent in less than a second). So if it is not even a jungle, but an ocean, and experimentation still requires breathing (underwater), then it is tempting to pollute. The trick of sustaining capital is that the costs incurred may be as or more expensive than its relatively positive creations. That is, the cost of experimentation is the

affordability of allowing any given capitalist sea monster to expand its territory and keep swimming, without too much risk of drowning the whole enterprise.

What is required is a pollution that is mindful of the ecology of the whole, sea, including the life that dwells beneath, and not any one particular monster.

To be slightly less metaphorical, the ocean is calling: excess pollution (caused by excess consumption, excess buying, excess production) is melting the frozen parts of the world, filling things up with water. It becomes a game of all or nothing: life or capital? As Zizek has noted, it is harder to imagine a subtle shift in capitalism than it is to imagine the end of the world. The problem is, as has already mentioned, that capital absorbs the basic ecological logic of life (profit over cost, eat enough to keep existing) and expands the cost of existing to the cost of perpetuating capital, and to sustain an endless production which is, in itself, a material impossibility.

The accelerationism of capital does not merely mean intensifying it further, but opening it to the exorbitant outside that it has refused to absorb. It means making it less selective in its own internal assignment

of cost when it refers to entities outside of it. It means engineering a permanent liquidity crisis. In a broad sense this is nothing particularly new to feminist critique, as it highlights the exclusion of particular cost in any exchange, an exclusion which has historically focused on women, on the contingent, the mad, the unpredictable, the amphibious maidens. Maybe this is why for Land the only proper revolutionary subjects are lesbian vampires.

Peter Watts in his Rifters series of Novels (*Starfish, Maelstrom, Behemoth and Behemoth Max*) documents a motley crew of individuals sent to watch over power stations on an ocean bottom rift, one of the last reliable sources of power on future earth. These people are strikingly posthuman, adapted biologically and technologically to work in their new environments and therefore chosen not for their scientific expertise but for the personality flaws that allow them to handle abuse and isolation.

In *Starfish*, the forces of capital are unable (albeit barely) to control the posthuman workers they have created. It is important to distinguish posthuman from posthumanist and transhuman. The posthumanist holds a stance in which we (whatever strange col-

lective that designates) should move beyond the human in its humanist sense and foster deeper relations with our own components and the components of our wider ecologies (our pets, our plants, the other various creatures and inanimate powers, texts, and things which vibrate in our presence). Transhumans, following thinkers such as Ray Kurzweil, believe that the human can be technological or biotechnologically surpassed with one popular end goal being the achievement of the uploadability of all of human consciousness.

With the concept of the posthuman, both humanism and the human are moved away from, without a teleological bettering nor with the certainty that supposedly long held human characteristics will remain after a material shift in the human body. There is no clear sense of improvement, but a different kind of adaptation. The rifters eventually come to refer to themselves as vampires as they are emotionally cold creatures meant for working in the dark without empathy or desire to be amongst humans.

The vampiric, as Deleuze and Guattari explore in "Becoming Animal" through the widespread Vampire Hysteria of the early 1700s in Eastern Europe, is a particular form

of becoming yet they do not address its noble lineage. While the zombie has become (starting with at least George Romero's films) the monster of capitalist disquiet, the vampire traditionally represents the lords of crumbling castles, of business people attempting to live out their retirement. As Marx puts it in the tenth chapter of *Capital*:

> Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the labourer works, is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has purchased of him.[5]

But Watts' vampires are the downtrodden worker. The trouble is that on the one hand, there seems to be no limits to the changes that capital writ large can incur in life—both life as everyday existence and life as actual biological existence. This is illustrated respectively by the increasing difficulty in getting 'out' of the office, and, as highlighted in hyperbolic terms by Watt's novels, with suicide seeds and copyrighted agricultural genomes. Yet there remain common barriers: one stressed by the limits of social connectivity and the other by material resources.

As the oceanic metaphor makes clear, being immersed in capital it becomes nearly impossible to diagnose our environment no matter how much economic friction remains. Economic crisis appears simultaneously too real and too abstract as either riots in the streets or as computational errors to be corrected by those officials with access and the capability.

How does one accelerate (in) a fluid medium?

Let's restate the problems:

1 - Technological capitalism (more than making all that is solid melt into air) makes solid or gives an extra layer of self-awareness to the creatures living in it. In this sense, capital becomes an ocean in which we swim, life seems unlivable without out and, the outlying bound of capital (which is the purely ideal impossible dream of limitless production) appears indistinguishable from the water at hand, from day to day life. Capitalism "has no external limit, it has consumed life and biological intelligence to create new life and a new plane of intelligence, vast beyond human anticipation."[6]

2 - Because of this illusion the cost involved in local exchanges is measured against not

only the local terms but against the far horizon of capital, while appearing ideally limitless is considered hyper-fragile in the intimacy of the exchange.

3 - This second issue is compounded by the history of practices of exogamy which demonstrate the simultaneous worth and worthlessness of women in patriarchal culture. Furthermore, the side of worthlessness can be equated with pure form or maybe even formlessness, that of the productive yet strangely undivided ocean.

4 - The ocean is populated with monsters... this is what Plant means with her something went wrong but that wrongness, that mistake is life itself. Or maybe the wrongness already registers once we achieve consciousness as Thomas Ligotti argues in *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*. The violence between organisms may make it seem that capital is merely a more civilized way but it actually just expands the killing floor to the end of time. As Land writes: "Capital is not overdeveloped nature, but underdeveloped schizophrenia."[7]

5 - For all of these reasons the acceleration of capitalism seems impossible. The only possible options seem to be to drown or embrace

the catastrophe (and the catastrophe of the sea is the tidal wave, the tsunami). But it may very well be that the wave, as Cederstrom and Fleming put it, may never come.

One can watch the wave, as a sublime monstrosity in the properly Kantian way (thinking my schema will protect me) or hope that it will peter out and bring new playthings like it did for the children of Nietzsche's Zarathustra. But this assumes that the ocean will serve and not, eventually, absorb more and more of the sun in its darkened complexion (having lost its reflective ice) and will flood the shores.

It is that challenge which requires the separation of technological accelerants from capitalist ones. Land writes that Nature (a cold indifferent nature)[8] is not opposed to cybernetics but to the industrial.[9] Schizoanalysis, the strange pragmatics of an anti-molar deregulation of all existence is at once the expansive capacity of capital that it cannot disavow[10], as well as that which is capable of luring capital into liquidating its "fall back positions."[11]

Nick Land hits on a basic twofold thought for thinking the crux of capital and politics (a politics beyond that world being used

descriptively in an academic setting). This is the gendering of both capital and politics in the territory of the active and the passive. Land writes:

> Wherever there is labour or struggle there is a repression of the raw creativity which is the atheological sense of matter and which - because of its anegoic effortlessness - seems identical with dying. Work, on the other hand, is an idealist principle used as a supplement or compensation for what matter cannot do. One only ever works against matter, which is why labour is able to replace violence in the Hegelian struggle for recognition. [12]

In November 1935 Bataille gave a speech at a gathering of Contre-Attaque called "Popular Front in the Street", in which he derided the overly parliamentary tactics of the Popular Front the synthesis of communists and socialists, that had recently taken over the street in France. Bataille's group Contre-Attaque set out to, in a sense, co-opt fascistic protocols and sharpen the teeth of the politics in France.[13]

Bataille says that he does not want to cause political change but calls for "a different nature."[14] Bataille ends his speech: "This All

powerful magnitude, thus human ocean... only this ocean of men in revolt can save the world from the nightmare of impotence and carnage in which it sinks!' [15] The fluidity of the ocean of workers is betrayed by Bataille's own machismo—he does not know whether he wants fluidity or solidity but is only sure in his vaguely Nietzschean overtones.

Land gives us an excellent response:

> If feminist struggles have been constantly deprioritized in theory and practice it is surely because of their idealistic recoil from the currency of violence, which is to say, from the only 'definitive 'matter' of politics. [...]It is a terrible fact that atrocity is not the perversion, but the very motor of of such struggles: the language of inexorable political will. A revolutionary war against a modern metropolitan state can only be fought in hell. [...] For it is only when the pervasive historical bond between masculinity and war is broken by effective feminist violence that it will become possible to envisage the uprooting of patriarchical endogamies that orchestrate the contemporary world order [...] we must foster new Amazons in our midst.[16]

An oceanic accelerationism, wired through

Plant and Luce Irigiray, is a marine violence, what Lennie Clarke, the anti-hero of Watts' tales learned by surviving domestic abuse, genetic manipulation, and attempted murder by a corporation.

To end on a strange aside: In the Marvel Comic universe there is a creature, an ancient self-aware bacterium from the oceanic depths, that possesses beings at will and sets out to erase all genetic mutations from the earth in order to be secure in its biologically rooted power. The name that this creature chooses for itself is sublime. This is the masculine impulse of capitalism personified, falsely positing itself as the transcendent sublime, in a brute attempt to deny the fluid mutations of the outside.

In one ridiculous gesture the weakness the ego in the face of nature becomes apparent (the Kantian schemata splitting the horrific from the sublime). The material vibrancy of the ocean will have the final judgment as long as we are complacent everywhere churlish masculinity is not. We must see capital as a great invention through which we can actively navigate uncertain waters, rather than as a sea monster, different from our own life only in its artificial provenance. Send out the distress call for cyberfeminism.

[1] See Cederstrom, Carl and Flemming, Peter, Dead Man Working, London, Zer0, 2012
[2] See Thacker, Eugene. "Oil Discovers Humans", in Leper Creativity, New York, Punctum, 2011
[3] Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari, "Becoming Animal...", A Thousand Plateaus, Minneapolis, Minneosta University Press, 1990
[4] On this point see Brassier, Ray, "Introduction to Nick Land", http://moskvax.wordpress.com/2010/09/30/accelerationism-ray-brassier/
[5] Marx, Karl, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Modern Library Classics, New York, Random House, 1906, p. 257
[6] Land, Nick, "Transcendental Miserablism", Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007, eds. Brassier, Ray and Robin Mackay, London, Urbanomic, 2011, p. 626
[7] Land, Nick, "Circuitries", Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007, p. 313
[8] Land, Nick, "Making it with Death", Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007, p. 261
[9] Land, Nick, "Circuitries", p. 313-314
[10] Land, Nick, "Making it with Death", 2011, p. 265
[11] Ibid., 287
[12] Ibid. 278
[13] Stoekl, Allan, "Introduction", Visions of Excess: Selected Writings of George Bataille, Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1995, xviii
[14] Bataille, George. "Popular Front in the Street", Visions of Excess: Selected Writings of George Bataille, Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1995,

p. 161

[15] Ibid., p. 168

[16] Land, Nick, "Kant, Capital, and the Prohibition of Incest," Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007, p. 79-80